"DER TAG"

OR

THE TRAGIC MAN

J. M. BARRIE

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THE TRAGIC MAN

BOOKS BY J. M. BARRIE

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CHARACTERS

EMPEROR

CHANCELLOR

OFFICER

SPIRIT OF CULTURE

"DER TAG"

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THE TRAGIC MAN

A bare chamber lighted by a penny dip which casts shadows. On a hard chair by a table sits an EMPEROR *in thought. To him come his* CHANCELLOR *and an* OFFICER.

CHANCELLOR. Your Imperial Majesty——

OFFICER. Sire——

EMPEROR (*the* EMPEROR *rises*). Is that the paper?

(*Indicating a paper in the* CHANCELLOR'S *hand.*)

CHANCELLOR (*presenting it*). It awaits only your Imperial Majesty's signature.

OFFICER. When you have signed that paper, Sire, the Fatherland will be at war with France and Russia.

EMPEROR. At last, this little paper——

CHANCELLOR. Not of the value of a bird's feather until it has your royal signature. The——

EMPEROR. Then it will sing round the planet. The vibration of it will not pass in a hundred years. My friend, how still the world has grown since I raised this pen! All Europe's listening. Europe! That's Germany, when I have signed! And yet——

OFFICER. Your Imperial Majesty is not afraid to sign?

EMPEROR (*flashing*). Afraid!

OFFICER (*abject*). Oh, Sire!

EMPEROR. I am irresistible to-day! "Red blood boils in my veins. To me every open door is the gift of a world! I hear a thousand nightingales! I would eat all the elephants in Hindustan and pick my teeth with the spire of Strassburg Cathedral."

OFFICER. That is the Fatherland to-day. Such as we are, that you have made us,

each seeking to copy you in so far as man can repeat his deity. It was you fashioned us into a sword, Sire, and now the sword must speak.

EMPEROR (*approvingly*). There the sword spoke—and yet the wise one said: "Take not your enemies together, but separately, lest the meal go to them instead of to you." One at a time. (*To* CHANCELLOR) Why am I not a friend of Russia till France is out of the way, or France's friend until the bear is muzzled? That was your part.

CHANCELLOR. For that I strove, but their mean minds suspected me. Sire, your signature!

EMPEROR. What of Britain?

OFFICER (*intently*). This—The Day, to which we have so often drunk, draws near!

EMPEROR. The Day! To The Day! (*All salute The Day with their swords.*) But when?

OFFICER. Now, if she wants it!

EMPEROR. There is no road to Britain—

until our neighbors are subdued. Then, for us, there will be no roads that do not lead to Britain.

CHANCELLOR (*suavely*). Your Imperial Majesty, Britain will not join in just now.

EMPEROR. If I was sure of that!

CHANCELLOR. I vouch for it. So well we've chosen our time, it finds her at issue with herself, her wild women let loose, her colonies ready to turn against her, Ireland aflame, the paltry British Army sulking with the civic powers.

EMPEROR. These wounds might heal suddenly if German bugles sounded. It is a land that in the past has done things.

OFFICER. In the past, your Imperial Majesty, but in the past alone lies Britain's greatness.

EMPEROR. Yes, that's the German truth. Britain has grown dull and sluggish; a belly of a land, she lies overfed; no dreams within her such as keep powers alive—and timid, too—without red blood in her, but

in its stead a thick, yellowish fluid. The most she'll play for is her own safety. Pretend to grant her that and she'll seek her soft bed again. Britain's part in the world's making is done. "I was," her epitaph.

CHANCELLOR. How well you know her, Sire! All she needs is some small excuse for saying, "I acted in the best interests of my money-bags." That excuse I've found for her. I have promised in your name a secret compact with her, that if she stands aloof the parts of France we do not at present need we will not at present take.

EMPEROR. A secret bargain over the head of France, her friend! Surely an infamous proposal.

CHANCELLOR. The British Government will not think so. Trust me to know them, Sire. Your signature?

EMPEROR (*gleaming*). I can fling a million men within the week across the border by way of Alsace and Lorraine.

OFFICER (*with a frown*). There are a hundred gates to open that way.

EMPEROR. My guns shall open them.

OFFICER (*with meaning*). You can think of no easier road, Sire?

EMPEROR. I think of it night and day.

OFFICER. One further north—through Belgium?

EMPEROR. If I could dare! But no, that road is barred.

OFFICER (*misunderstanding*). On the contrary, Sire——

EMPEROR. Barred by a fortress no gun of mine may bear against—by honor, by my plighted word.

OFFICER. Yet, Sire——

EMPEROR (*after hesitating*). No, no! I will not so stain my name.

CHANCELLOR. I am with you, Sire, but I fear it will not be so with France. She has grown cynical. She will find the road through Belgium.

EMPEROR. You seek to tempt me. She also signed the treaty.

CHANCELLOR. Your Imperial Majesty judges others by yourself. I have private ground for fearing that in the greed for a first advantage France will call the treaty but a scrap of paper.

EMPEROR. I think your private ground may be your own private newspaper.

CHANCELLOR. She will say that necessity knows no law, or some such dastard words.

EMPEROR. Belgium is no craven. She will fight the betrayer.

CHANCELLOR. France will hack her way through her.

EMPEROR. My Chancellor, that is a hideous phrase.

CHANCELLOR. I ask your pardon, Sire. It came, somehow, pat to my lips.

OFFICER. Your Imperial Majesty, the time passes. Will it please you to sign?

CHANCELLOR. Bonaparte would have acted quickly.

EMPEROR. Bonaparte!

CHANCELLOR. The paper, Sire.

EMPEROR. Leave it now with me. Return in an hour and you shall have it signed.

OFFICER (*warningly*). The least delay——

CHANCELLOR. Overmuch reflection——

EMPEROR. I wish to be alone.

(*They retire respectfully, but anxious. He is left alone in thought.*)

EMPEROR. Even a King's life is but a day, and in his day the sun is only at its zenith once. This is my zenith; others will come to Germany, but not to me. The world pivots on me to-night. They said Bonaparte, coupling me with him. To dim Napoleon! Paris in three weeks—say four, to cover any chance miscalculation; Russia on her back in six, with Poland snapping at her, and then, after a breathing space, we reach—The Day! We sweep the English Channel, changing its name as we embark, and cross by way of Calais, which will have fallen easily into our hands, the British fleet destroyed—for that is part of the plan—Dover to

London is a week of leisured marching, and London itself, unfortified and panic-stricken, falls in a day! *Væ victis!* I'll leave conquered Britain some balls to play with, so that there shall be no uprising. Next I carve America in great mouthfuls for my colonists, for now I strike the seas. It's all so docketed. I feel it's as good as done before I set forth to do it. Dictator of the world! And all for pacific ends. For once, the whole is mine. We come at last to the great desideratum, a universal peace. Rulers over all! God in the heavens, I upon the earth—we two! (*Raising his brows threateningly*) *And there are still the Zeppelins!* I'll sign!

(*He sits in thought. He is very tired, and soon he is asleep. The lighting becomes strange; he dreams, and we see his dream. The* Spirit of Culture *appears, a noble female figure in white robes.*)

EMPEROR. Who's that?

CULTURE. A friend. I am Culture, who has so long hovered well-placed over happy Germany.

EMPEROR (*who gives her royal honor*). A friend —a consort! I would hear you say, O Queen, that I have done some things for you.

CULTURE. You have done much for me. I have held my head higher since you were added to the roll of sovereigns. I may have smiled at you at times, as when you seemed to think that you were the two of us in one, but as Kings go you have been a worthy King.

EMPEROR. It was all done for you.

CULTURE. So, for long, I thought. I looked upon Germany's golden granaries, plucked from ground once barren; its busy mills and furnaces, its outstretching commerce and teeming people and noble seats of learning, all mellowing in the sun, and I heard you say they were dedicate to me,

and I was proud. You have honored me, my Emperor, and now I am here to be abased by you. All the sweet garments you have robed me in, tear them off me and send me naked out of Germany.

EMPEROR. You would not have me sign?

CULTURE. I warn you first to know yourself, you who have gloated in a looking-glass too long.

EMPEROR. I sign, so that Germany may be greater still, to spread your banner farther; thus I make the whole world cultured.

CULTURE. My banner needs no such spreading. It has ever been your weakness to think that I have no other home save here in Germany. I have many homes, and the fairest is in France.

EMPEROR. If that were true, Germany would care less for you.

CULTURE. If that is true, I have never had a home in Germany. I am no single nation's servant, no single race's Queen.

I am not of German make. My banner is already in every land on which you would place your heel. Culture spreads not by way of maiming freedom. I'll not have you say you fight for me. Find some other reason.

EMPEROR. The jealousies of nations——

CULTURE. All are guilty there. Jealousy, not love of money, is the root of all evil; that was a misprint. Yet I know of nothing those others want that is yours to give, save peace. What do you want of them? Bites out of each, and when they refuse to be dismembered you cry: "The blood be on their heads; they force me into war."

EMPEROR. Germany must expand. That is her divine mission; I have it from on high.

CULTURE. Your system of espionage is known to be tolerably complete.

EMPEROR. All Germany is with me. I hold in leash the mightiest machine for war the world has forged.

CULTURE. I have seen your legions, and all are with you. Never was a Lord more trusted. O Emperor, does that not make you pause?

EMPEROR. France invades little Belgium.

CULTURE. Chivalrous France! Never! Emperor, I leave one last word to you at the parting of the ways. France, Russia, Britain, these are great opponents, but it is not they will bring the pillars of Germany down. Beware of Belgium!

(*She goes. He is left in two minds. He crosses to sign. He flings down the pen. He strikes the bell.* CHANCELLOR *and* OFFICER *reappear.*)

CHANCELLOR. Your Imperial Majesty has signed?

EMPEROR. Thus (*he tears the paper*).

OFFICER. Sire!

EMPEROR. Say this to Russia, France, and Britain in my Imperial name: So long as they keep within their borders I remain in mine.

OFFICER. But, Sire——

EMPEROR. You know, as I do, that it is all they ask for.

CHANCELLOR. You were the friend of Austria.

EMPEROR. I'll prove it. Tell her from me that Servia has yielded on every point which doth become a nation and that Austria may accept her terms.

CHANCELLOR. Nay, Sire——

EMPEROR. And so, there will be no war.

OFFICER. Sire, we beg——

EMPEROR. These are my commands.

(*They have to go, chagrined, but deferential.*)

EMPEROR. The decision lay with me, and I said there shall be peace. That be my zenith!

(*He goes back to the chair; he sleeps peacefully; in the distance a bell tolls the Angelus, and suddenly this is broken by one boom of a great gun, which reverberates and should be start-*

ling. The SPIRIT OF CULTURE *returns, now with a wound in her breast; she surveys him sadly.*)

CULTURE. Sleep on, unhappy King. (*He grows restless.*) Better to wake if even your dreams appal you.

(*He wakes, and for a moment he scarcely understands that he has been dreaming; the realization is tragic to him.*)

EMPEROR. You! You have come here to mock me!

CULTURE. Oh, no.

EMPEROR. I dreamed there was no war. In my dream they came to me and I forbade the war. I saw the Fatherland smiling and prosperous, as it was before the war.

CULTURE. It was you who made the war, O Emperor!

EMPEROR (*huskily*). Belgium?

CULTURE. There is no Belgium now, but over what was Belgium there rests a soft light, as of a helm, and through it is a flaming sword.

EMPEROR. I dreamed I had kept my plighted word to Belgium.

CULTURE. It was you, O Emperor, who broke your plighted word and laid waste the land. In the lust for victory you violated even the laws of war which men contrive so that when the sword is sheathed they may dare again face their Maker. Your way to Him is lighted now by smouldering spires and ashes that were once fair academic groves of mine, and you shall seek Him over roads cobbled with the moans of innocents.

EMPEROR. In my dream I thought England was grown degenerate and would not fight.

CULTURE. She fought you where Crécy was, and Agincourt, and Waterloo, with all their dead to help her. The dead became quick in their ancient graves, stirred by the tread of the island feet, and they cried out: "How is England doing?" The living answered the dead upon their

bugles with the "All's well." England, O Emperor, was grown degenerate, but you, *you*, have made her great.

EMPEROR. France, Russia?

CULTURE. They are here around your walls.

EMPEROR. My people?

CULTURE. I see none marching but men whose feet make no sound. Shades of your soldiers who pass on and on, in never-ending lines.

EMPEROR. Do they curse me?

CULTURE. None curses; they all salute you as they pass. They have done your bidding.

EMPEROR. The women curse me?

CULTURE. Not even the women. They, too, salute you. You were their Father and could do no wrong.

EMPEROR. And you?

CULTURE. I have come with this gaping wound in my breast to bid you farewell.

EMPEROR. God cannot let my Germany be utterly destroyed.

CULTURE. If God is with the Allies, Germany will not be destroyed. Farewell.

(*She is going. She lifts a pistol from the table and puts it in his hand. It is all she can do for her old friend. She goes away with shining eyes. The penny dip burns low. The great Emperor is lost in its shadows.*)

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Barrie, J.
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